

# Planning the Weekly Schedule in the Elementary Grades



Issued Jointly by:  
Office of Early Childhood  
and  
Accreditation and School Improvement  
Nebraska Department of Education  
Box 94987  
Lincoln, Nebraska 68509-4987

## Purpose of the Booklet

This booklet is intended to assist teachers and administrators as they plan and organize appropriate learning activities for children in the elementary grades. Kindergarten experiences and schedules are discussed in a separate brochure, *"Planning the Use of time in the Kindergarten."*

## School Purposes and Goals

Each elementary school should be guided by a statement of philosophy or mission which is reflective of the school community and which directs the purposes and goals of the school. The elementary instructional program should appropriately support children in achieving high standards of learning. Teachers and administrators should take great care in planning activities and weekly schedules to assure that instructional methods, strategies, and procedures enable all students to Successfully achieve local and/or state standards or goals.

## Instructional Hours

The minimum number of hours that schools must be in session each school year is established in Nebraska state law. Elementary schools are required to provide at least 1032 hours of instruction per year, and local school boards are required through Rule 10 (accreditation) (nonpublic schools in Rule 14, approval) to develop a policy which defines instructional hours. The local policy should establish clear direction for teachers and administrators regarding the instructional activities which may be counted as part of the 1032 hours, and specifically those which are excluded. For example, Rule 10 and Rule 14 direct that lunch time may not be counted in meeting the minimum instructional hours.

## The Weekly Schedule

Rule 10 and Rule 14 require that each elementary school have on file a representative weekly schedule for each classroom teacher encompassing experiences in reading and language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, health, physical education, art, and music. Writing experiences, educational/computer technology, and, in public schools, multicultural education, are also to be incorporated in the instructional program. These requirements are intended to assure that all children experience a well rounded curriculum on a weekly basis while giving the school flexibility in organizing the elementary program.

The daily or weekly instructional schedule should provide guidance to the teacher and generally bring about needed stability in the events of the child's day. However, the schedule should remain flexible. Learning is an integrated process and the time spent on any area of the curriculum will vary from day to day or from week to week. For example, a large block of time scheduled to engage children in a science investigation which also incorporates appropriate language arts activities may alter the schedule for that particular day. During another day, a larger portion of time may be directed to math and problem solving activities. The instruction planned from day to day should balance vigorous and quiet activities. The children should have many opportunities to participate in "hands-on" activities and projects and in large and small group discussions, as well as in independent and quiet seatwork. Assessment practices should also encourage integration of subject or learning experiences and be incorporated into regular instruction to guide students and teachers.





## Use of the Time Chart

The chart herein (see page 8) is intended to provide some general guidance in developing a balanced schedule for the elementary school day and week. Since Nebraska state law establishes only a minimum length for the entire school year (1032 hours), the length of the school day varies somewhat from school to school. To accommodate these differences, the accompanying chart uses percentages of time as well as numbers of minutes to provide suggested weekly time allotments for each subject area.



## The Elementary Subject Areas

### Description and Recommendations

The elementary instructional program should help all children acquire basic skills, knowledge, and understandings in each curricular area. As indicated in the quality indicators for Elementary Curriculum in Rule 10: "The elementary instructional program is based on state or locally approved standards for student learning and helps each student acquire knowledge, skills, and understanding in all subject areas. The instruction is appropriate for the development level of the students. Teaching and learning activities and the general environment stimulate, nurture, and encourage involvement in a wide range of learning experiences. The program helps students apply and extend basic skills by integrating topics throughout the curriculum. The schedule is sufficiently flexible to encourage teachers and students to address emergent needs and topics. The elementary curriculum includes the components described below:"

#### Reading and Language Arts

The curriculum includes development and practice of skills and understanding in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. It helps children develop appreciation of literature, creativity, and expression.

#### Mathematics

The curriculum includes development, practice, and application of numeration, computation, estimation, problem solving, geometry/spatial concepts, measurement and related topics.



## Social Studies

The curriculum helps children to develop an understanding of the world and its people. It includes experiences drawn from geography, history, economics, government, citizenship, career awareness, human relations, current affairs, and cultural studies. This includes instruction American history and stories about the exploits and deeds of American heroes, singing patriotic songs, memorizing the Star Spangled Banner and America and reverence for the flag and proper conduct for its presentation as provided in 79-724 R.R.S.

## Science

The curriculum helps children develop an understanding of science concepts and processes, and includes science as inquiry. It includes experiences drawn from physical science, life science, earth and space science, science and technology, and history and nature of science.

## Health

The curriculum helps children develop an understanding of the body systems, nutrition, wellness (including physical activity), and healthy living habits.

## Physical Education

The curriculum helps children develop and maintain physical coordination, large and small muscle control, physical fitness, leisure activities, and healthy behaviors.



## Visual Arts

The curriculum helps children understand and apply a variety of media techniques, and processes within a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas. The curriculum includes reflection upon and assessment of art and study of art in relation to history, culture, and other curricular areas.



## Music

The curriculum helps children to sing and play a variety of music, read and notate music, listen to and describe music, and evaluate music. The curriculum includes music in relation to history culture, and other curricular areas.



## The Importance of Integrated Learning Opportunities

In a chart such as this, time allotments are shown for individual subjects. However, a visual representation of the weekly schedule cannot portray the dynamic relationships that should exist among the curricular areas in the elementary school. Throughout the week, topics of study (such as weather, or animals, or early explorers) should be used to integrate various subjects. On this chart, the language arts time is intended to cover that time devoted to specific instruction in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Use and practice of language arts skills should be included in many ways in all of the other curricular areas, but especially in social studies, science, and health.

Also, as much as possible, teachers should integrate art, music, health, and physical education with the other curricular areas. Children learn many of the “basic academic skills” through experiences in the arts. Language development and awareness of special relationships basic to reading, writing, and math are enhanced remarkably through dramatization, creative movement, and work in the visual arts. Such opportunities should be provided often for all children to strengthen their disposition to be readers and writers.

When planning the schedule, large blocks of time will accommodate inclusion of language arts throughout the curriculum. Too much time spent studying about reading and writing skills with little opportunity to actually read and write may discourage rather than contribute to progress in the language arts. Therefore, children should be provided ample time to read a variety of library materials as well as regular textbooks. Also, writing opportunities should be provided daily through many experiences such as writing journals, stories, paragraphs, captions, letters, charts, and plays. Good social studies, science, and health activities will frequently have writing and reading associated with them. Examples include describing science experiments or preparing social studies charts, dramatizations, posters, and booklets. These kinds of purposeful and authentic learning experiences should be used rather than “fill-in-the-blank” worksheets or workbooks.





## Suggested Weekly Time Allotments for the Subject Areas in the Elementary School

Minutes Per Week	Percent of Time	PRIMARY (Gr 1-2)	INTERMEDIATE (Gr 3-4)	UPPER (Gr 5-6 or 5-8)	Percent of Time	Minutes Per Week
126	5%	(7%)	MUSIC	(7%)	5%	126
126	10%	(7%)	ART	(7%)	10%	126
225	15%				15%	
225	20%	(12 ½%)	SOCIAL STUDIES	(17 ½%)	20%	315
630	25%				25%	
630	30%				30%	
630	35%				35%	
630	40%	(35%)	LANGUAGE ARTS AND READING	(25%)	40%	450
630	45%				45%	
630	50%				50%	
630	55%				55%	
225	60%				60%	
225	65%	(12 ½%)	SCIENCE AND HEALTH	(17 ½%)	65%	315
270	70%				70%	
270	75%				75%	
270	80%	(15%)	MATH	(15%)	80%	270
108	85%				85%	
108	90%	(6%)	PHYSICAL EDUC.	(6%)	90%	108
90	95%				95%	
90	100%	(5%)	OTHER	(5%)	100%	90
1800						1800

The accompanying narrative provides information necessary to interpret this diagram. This chart is based on 6-hour days, excluding lunch.

## Other Instructional Time

In addition to listing the curricular areas, the chart includes a small percentage of time designated as “other.” This time is intended for those activities that support the elementary curriculum and instructional programs. Instruction in computer skills and technology, library-media time or foreign language experiences are common examples. Also, students and teachers together may utilize this time to discuss, organize, or summarize daily experiences, or engage in other supportive learning activities.

The daily schedule should also include appropriate time for recess, especially in the lower and intermediate grades. Recess supports children’s need for less structured time, and should be a time for children to relax without having to be attentive to an instructional activity. Physical education class is usually not an appropriate substitute for a recess break.

## Length of the School Day

Although Nebraska laws and regulations give local school systems total responsibility for establishing the length of the school day, it is recommended that the day for the elementary age student be a minimum of five and one-half and a maximum of seven hours in length. In circumstances where the elementary school must schedule long days to accommodate district bussing schedules, teachers and administrators should provide a schedule that assures children ample time for recess and various other activities of less structured nature.



## Teacher Assignment

The elementary endorsement on the teaching certificate indicates that the teacher is prepared to teach all subjects in the elementary grades. A teacher who spends most of the day with one group of children in a self-contained classroom setting has the best opportunity to integrate the content of the instructional program. Also, this setting provides the teacher with ample flexibility in adjusting the daily activities (schedule) to meet the changing needs of the children.

Widespread use of departmentalization within the elementary school is generally not recommended. Departmentalization tends to place the focus of instruction on isolated subject matter rather than on the rich integration of curricular content, ideas, and concepts which make learning meaningful for children. In addition, the frequent movement of children from class to class serves as an interruption to quality learning time and may contribute to inappropriate student behavior.

The subjects of art, music, and physical education are, in some elementary schools, taught by teachers assigned specifically to those curricular areas. In those instances, teachers and school administrators are strongly encouraged to assure that all teachers involved in the instructional program of the child coordinate their activities, goals, objectives, and lessons. The responsibility lies with the staff to share ideas and to integrate instruction, with the clear intent of making learning meaningful, real, and appropriate for each child.



## Conclusion

A visit to a typical elementary classroom should reveal teachers providing instruction in exciting ways and children who are truly engaged in active and meaningful learning experiences. The daily and weekly schedule should be supportive of such an educationally sound learning environment and should reflect that a well-rounded instructional program is provided for all elementary children. A good schedule, functioning as a helpful guide for teachers, provides stability in the student day yet assures flexibility in meeting the changing needs of students. The following items are intended to serve as a guide when planning the daily and weekly elementary classroom schedule:

- ◆ Includes all curricular areas, at least weekly
- ◆ Is typically based on a six hour school day, not counting lunch time.
- ◆ Provides large blocks of time supportive of the integration of curricular areas.
- ◆ Provides flexibility, encouraging a variety of instructional activities (projects, plays, investigations, movement activities, quiet time, expressive writing, reading of literature.)



## References

The Nebraska Department of Education publishes a number of resources to assist teachers in planning and carrying out programs which are both developmentally appropriate and intellectually rigorous:

Rule 10 (*Regulations and Procedures for the Accreditation of Schools*) January 4, 2003.

Rule 14 (*Regulations and Procedures for the Legal Operation of Approved Nonpublic Schools*) January 14, 1996.

Nebraska and Iowa Departments of Education. (2001). The Primary Program: Growing and Learning in the Heartland. Lincoln, NE: Nebraska Department of Education. May be ordered by calling 402-471-3184.

Nebraska Standards, Frameworks for various subjects are available on the Nebraska Department of Education web site ([www.nde.state.ne.us](http://www.nde.state.ne.us)) or by calling (402) 471-6692

